

Give Thanks to the Lord of History

Psalm 105

Pastor Jason Van Bommel

- ¹ Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!*
- ² Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!*
- ³ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!*
- ⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually!*
- ⁵ Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,*
- ⁶ O offspring of Abraham, his servant,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones!*
- ⁷ He is the LORD our God;
his judgments are in all the earth.*
- ⁸ He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,*
- ⁹ the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,*
- ¹⁰ which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,*
- ¹¹ saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance."*
- ¹² When they were few in number,
of little account, and sojourners in it,*
- ¹³ wandering from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people,*
- ¹⁴ he allowed no one to oppress them;
he rebuked kings on their account,*
- ¹⁵ saying, "Touch not my anointed ones,
do my prophets no harm!"*

- 16 When he summoned a famine on the land
and broke all supply^l of bread,
17 he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
18 His feet were hurt with fetters;
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
19 until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD tested him.
20 The king sent and released him;
the ruler of the peoples set him free;
21 he made him lord of his house
and ruler of all his possessions,
22 to bind^l his princes at his pleasure
and to teach his elders wisdom.
- 23 Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24 And the LORD made his people very fruitful
and made them stronger than their foes.
25 He turned their hearts to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants.
- 26 He sent Moses, his servant,
and Aaron, whom he had chosen.
27 They performed his signs among them
and miracles in the land of Ham.
28 He sent darkness, and made the land dark;
they did not rebel^l against his words.
29 He turned their waters into blood
and caused their fish to die.
30 Their land swarmed with frogs,
even in the chambers of their kings.
31 He spoke, and there came swarms of flies,
and gnats throughout their country.
32 He gave them hail for rain,
and fiery lightning bolts through their land.

- 33 He struck down their vines and fig trees,
and shattered the trees of their country.
- 34 He spoke, and the locusts came,
young locusts without number,
35 which devoured all the vegetation in their land
and ate up the fruit of their ground.
- 36 He struck down all the firstborn in their land,
the firstfruits of all their strength.
- 37 Then he brought out Israel with silver and gold,
and there was none among his tribes who stumbled.
- 38 Egypt was glad when they departed,
for dread of them had fallen upon it.
- 39 He spread a cloud for a covering,
and fire to give light by night.
- 40 They asked, and he brought quail,
and gave them bread from heaven in abundance.
- 41 He opened the rock, and water gushed out;
it flowed through the desert like a river.
- 42 For he remembered his holy promise,
and Abraham, his servant.
- 43 So he brought his people out with joy,
his chosen ones with singing.
- 44 And he gave them the lands of the nations,
and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil,
- 45 that they might keep his statutes
and observe his laws.

Praise the LORD!

Intro: History as God's Story

Okay, I have a confession to make: I have always loved history. I have another: I have never really understood people who think history is boring or irrelevant. Maybe part of that is because my first memories of learning history aren't filled with random lists of names and dates. I remember reading a biography of Alexander Hamilton in elementary school. I was interested in Hamilton because we thought we might be related to him. (We aren't.) But reading a biography is a much better way to be

introduced to history than date lists. That's because history is a story, and it's really the story of the lives of people.

History is relevant to all of us, because we're all people living in time, a time which future generations will call history. The people from history are not really that different from us: They had dreams and aspirations, fears and failures, struggles and triumphs. They had relationships – family and friends – and convictions and doubts. Some of them seemed to know clearly how much they had accomplished and contributed to the world, while others died in relative obscurity, their significance only emerging later, years after their deaths. But, as believers, history is even more relevant to us, because the Lord of History is our God and Father. The One who was faithful to His promises to His people in past generations, despite their sins and failures is the same One who will be faithful to His promises to us, despite our fears, sins, and failures.

Today, we are looking at Psalm 105, and next week we are looking at Psalm 106. These are two historical psalms which close Book IV of the Psalms. They are a pair, meant to go together, probably written by the same person at the same time drawn from the same source. I Chronicles 16 tells the story of David bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. In verse 7, we read, "*on that day David first assigned Asaph and his relatives to give thanks to the LORD.*"

Then, we have a psalm which runs from v. 8 to v. 36 of I Chronicles 16. It's not clear from verse 7 whether David wrote this psalm and gave it Asaph or whether he asked Asaph to give thanks to the Lord and then Asaph wrote the psalm. The psalm begins with the same first 15 verses as Psalm 105. The middle part then matches Psalm 96, and the ending verses match the ending of Psalm 106. So, it seems like the author of Psalms 105 & 106 intentionally took this psalm of thanks from I Chronicles and expanded it into a pair of historical psalms. Since Psalm 96 is also in Book IV of the Psalms and also has no named author, I think it's likely that Psalm 96 has the same author. In fact, it seems likely to me that the author of Psalms 96, 105 and 106 is also the same author as the writer of Chronicles, and that they were all likely written around the same time, the psalms being based on an earlier writing by David or Asaph.

Based on this evidence, it seems like the author is most likely Ezra the Scribe, who also wrote Chronicles and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. I think Ezra is the most likely person to be the final compiler of the Book of Psalms as we have it, and is one of the least known and most important people in getting the Old Testament to us.

Here, Ezra gives us a pair of psalms for giving thanks to God that are rooted in history. Together, Psalms 105 & 106 cover both sides of the story of God's redemption of His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land. Psalm 105 focuses on God's faithfulness to keep His covenant promise to Abraham, while Psalm 106 focuses on the constant sin and rebellion of God's people. Together, they give us words to thank the Lord for being faithful to keep His covenant promises to His people despite our constant sin and stubborn rebellion. And while these are lengthy psalms with lots of historical detail in them, they help us see something really important and wonderful: God always keeps His covenant promises to His people, faithfully giving what He has promised, despite our tendency toward foolish, sinful rebellion against Him.

A. How We Worship the Lord of History, vv. 1-6

Psalm 105 begins with a brief master-course in right worship. How do we worship God? Verses 1-6 give us 7 elements of worship along with the right attitude or mindset we need, rooted in who God is and what He has done for us, or who He has made us to be as His chosen people:

- ¹ *Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon his name;
make known his deeds among the peoples!*
- ² *Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wondrous works!*
- ³ *Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice!*
- ⁴ *Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually!*
- ⁵ *Remember the wondrous works that he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he uttered,*
- ⁶ *O offspring of Abraham, his servant,
children of Jacob, his chosen ones!*

What are the elements of right worship?

1. Thanksgiving – “Give thanks to the Lord”
2. Prayer of Invocation – “call upon His name”
3. Proclamation – “make known His deeds . . . tell of all His wonderful works”
4. Singing
5. Praise – “glory in His holy name”
6. Prayers of Intercession – “seek the Lord” “Seek the Lord and His strength”
7. Remembrance of God’s works and words

We do these things with joy and earnestness and gratitude and wonder because of who God is as the One who is worthy of all praise and also because of who He, in His grace, has made us to be. We are “*offspring of Abraham, his servant, children of Jacob, his chosen ones!*” If you don’t think this description applies to you because you’re not Jewish, read Galatians 3-4 when you get home this afternoon. “*If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise,*” as Galatians 3:29 says.

So, this song is to be sung by the church today, for it is those who belong to Christ Jesus who are the heirs of these covenant promises and this redemption story. This is truly OUR story, as well as His story. His covenant faithfulness and our redemption.

B. Why We Worship the Lord of History, vv. 7-11

Well, if verses 1-6 establish the pattern for how we are to worship the Lord, verses 7-11 get to the heart of why we worship the Lord, and the message of verses 7-11 will be unpacked and illustrated in the rest of the psalm:

First, verse 7: “He is the LORD our God; His judgments are in all the earth.” He is YaHWeH, the eternally unchanging and self-sufficient One who is our God, and His judgements are in all the earth. That is, He is absolutely sovereign over all things all over the world. Not just over His people and their history, but over all people and all history over the whole earth, we can see the Lord’s judgments at work.

His judgments in all the earth have a purpose: to keep His covenant promises:

*He remembers his covenant forever,
the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations,
9 the covenant that he made with Abraham,
his sworn promise to Isaac,
10 which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant,
11 saying, “To you I will give the land of Canaan
as your portion for an inheritance.”*

“A thousand generations” is a way of saying “forever.” We are here some 2,500 years after Psalm 105 was written, and God’s covenant promises still stand today. The specific promise named here of land to Abraham and his offspring has been expanded in Christ to the promise that “the meek” who trust in the Lord “will inherit the earth.” As with all things in the Old Testament, we need to read these verses through the lens of their fulfillment in Christ. This is not about a strip of land on the east coast of the Mediterranean Sea being given to ethnic Jews. It’s far bigger than that. In the words of 2 Cor. 1:20-22:

For all the promises of God find their “Yes” in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory. And it is God who establishes us with you in Christ, and has anointed us, and who has also put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee. (ESV)

So, Psalm 105 is ultimately calling us to thank and worship God because of all of His covenant promises which are fulfilled in Christ and applied to us by the Holy Spirit.

C. Wonderful Works of the Lord of History, vv 12-42

The bulk of Psalm 105, verses 12-42, unpacks and illustrates God’s faithfulness to His covenant promises by rehearsing the history of God’s redemption of His people from the time when He made His covenant with Abraham to the time of the conquest of Canaan, the Promised Land, under Joshua. So, these verses cover about 500 years of history, from around 1950 BC to around 1450 BC – the same amount of time as from the days of Martin Luther, who began the Reformation in 1517-1518, until now. I think this is significant because it had been about 500 years since the days of King David, when part of this was first sung in 1 Chronicles 16, to the days when Ezra wrote Psalm 105 – from about the year 1000 BC to about the year 500 BC. The people of God wanted to know if the Lord was still going to keep His covenant promises, if the God of David and Solomon, some 500 years earlier, would still be their God and would bless them as they had rebuilt the Temple and re-established His worship in Jerusalem.

God's people had passed through hardship and trouble, and they had also been blessed and wonderfully restored to the Land. So the focus of verses 12-42 is on the faithful sovereignty of God in BOTH the trials and the triumphs of His people.

Notice the strong language of God's sovereign hand at work in both the trials and triumphs of God's people:

Trials –

*16 When he summoned a famine on the land
and broke all supply¹ of bread,
17 he had sent a man ahead of them,
Joseph, who was sold as a slave.
18 His feet were hurt with fetters;
his neck was put in a collar of iron;
19 until what he had said came to pass,
the word of the LORD tested him. – vv. 16-19*

*23 Then Israel came to Egypt;
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24 And the LORD made his people very fruitful
and made them stronger than their foes.
25 He turned their hearts to hate his people,
to deal craftily with his servants. – vv. 23-25*

It is absolutely vital that we hear these strong words. God sent the famine on the land. God sent Joseph, sold as a slave and hurt by prison, and kept him imprisoned until the time was right. God turned the hearts of the Egyptians against the Israelites and caused them to hate His people. It was their hate, and they are responsible for their own hatred, but God wanted it directed against His people, as key to their deliverance by His hand.

- If God had not sent famine, the people of Israel would not have ended up in Egypt.
- If God had not put Joseph in prison and kept him there, he would not have been in a position to interpret Pharaoh's dream and be used by God to deliver His people.
- If God had not turned the hearts of the Egyptians against His people, His people would never have wanted to leave Egypt and journey to the Promised Land.
- If God had not led the Egyptians to deal shrewdly with the Israelites, He would not have had occasion to display His power in the plagues He used to deliver His people.

We need to see how all of these trials – as terrible as they were in themselves – were all ordained by God to be used as part of His greater plan for the display of His own glory and the good of His people in keeping His promise toward them. We need to see this because we need to know that He is the Lord of our trials, too, and that He orders our hardships for the same reason, to show His glory in saving us. If we were left comfortable in our sin and unbelief, we would be cut off from God and His saving grace forever. So often, the very things which hurt us so deeply are the things God uses to draw us to Himself.

Triumphs –

But God is not only sovereign over our trials, but He also governs our triumphs as well, which He also uses for His glory and our good in the keeping of His promises to us.

Psalm 105 focuses on two major triumphs of God's people: The rise of Joseph to be Prime Minister of Egypt and the powerful plagues and exodus of Israel from Egypt. On this second point, many critics of the Bible say Psalm 105 is mistaken because it puts the plagues in the wrong order and skips two of them. But Psalm 105 is a song of thanksgiving, not a history lesson. It's celebrating the power of God as the One True God over the pretended power of the false gods of Egypt.

Not only is God sovereign over both the trials and the triumphs of His people, but the triumphs come only after the trials and the trials are necessary to set up the triumphs. This is a consistent pattern in the life of God's people – the cross comes before the crown; not only that, but the cross is necessary to make way for the crown. Christ was humiliated to the point of death on a cross before He was exalted far above every name. The same is true for us who follow Him: In this life, we suffer trials and struggles before we experience victory, and we don't experience the full and final victory at all in this life. That crown awaits us in glory!

D. The Purpose of the Lord of History, vv. 43-45

The last three verses of Psalm 105 bring us to our response and to God's purpose in delivering His people from Egypt and bringing them into the Promised Land:

43 So he brought his people out with joy,

his chosen ones with singing.

44 And he gave them the lands of the nations,

and they took possession of the fruit of the peoples' toil,

45 that they might keep his statutes

and observe his laws.

Praise the LORD!

Why did God bring His people into the Promised Land? It was so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws. It was so they would honor Him and obey Him. Why? Well, for their own good, as well as for the display of His wisdom and goodness to them, of course.

When we say God works all things for His glory and for our good, this is central to it. He redeems us and keeps His covenant promises of redemption to us. He saves us. He does two great miraculous things to make this a reality:

1. Christ takes our sin on Himself on the cross, vanquishing sin and death in His death and resurrection.
2. The Holy Spirit changes our hearts and brings us to faith in Christ and to new life in Him.

In other words, God miraculously BOTH accomplishes our salvation in Christ's death and resurrection AND He miraculously applies that redemption to us by changing our hearts and giving us new life in Jesus.

Why does He do that? So we will have reason to praise Him, thank Him, tell of His wonderful works, and glory in His name? Yes, absolutely! But that's not all. He also does it so we will belong to Him, truly. He does it to make us His, and part of what it means to be His is to obey Him, to follow His ways and not our own. Why? Just so God will get His way in the end? No! It's because His ways are better than our ways, and we need to walk in His ways in order to live life as God intended, in order to thrive as we were made to thrive.

God keeps His promises and redeems His people so that we will worship Him and obey Him, from the heart, sincerely. And as we worship Him and obey Him, our lives become a living expression of the close of Psalm 105, and we *Praise the LORD!* We sing and live a resounding *Hallelujah!*